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ABSTRACT

A pilot study was conducted to: examine the beliefs of Institutional Research (IR) managers and senior administrators concerning the function, purpose and priorities of IR; determine if beliefs have been translated into practice; ascertain the extent of congruence between perceptions and beliefs held at each level of management; and examine whether the beliefs of IR managers and current practices are consistent with what senior administrators believe should be the role of IR. Using a population of university centers and arts and sciences institutions in large, multi-campus, state-supported systems, 33 surveys were administered, 17 to IR managers (100% response rate) and 16 to senior administrators (64.7% response rate). Results included the following: (1) only 26.7% of IR managers and 54.5% of senior administrators believe that general institutional expectations are realistic and clear; (2) only 37.6% of IR managers and 72.7% of senior administrators believe that faculty members possess a positive perception of IR; (3) both groups believe that IR functions should include data collection, analysis and dissemination; state and federal reporting, policy-oriented research, serving as a clearinghouse for data, defining the institutional database and projecting enrollment; and (4) 100% of senior administrators and 73.3% of the IR managers believe that IR should measure outcomes. Data are provided in four tables. Contains 10 references. (KM)

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The Practice of Institutional Research: Perception vs. Reality

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THE PRACTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH: PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

Background and Introduction

Institutional research (IR) emerged as an organized effort in higher education administration in the 1950s and evolved rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. Since this period, the field has grown and is continuing to expand rapidly in terms of concept, function and methodology. One observation that can be made about institutional research is that its practice seems to be linked not only to specific institutional issues and concerns, but increasingly to emerging external demands and pressures. Seemingly, external factors have exerted the greatest influence on the emergence of common themes and a common interdisciplinary base among the practitioners of institutional research (McCoy & Smith, 1985).

In addition to the general administrative context within which institutional research operates, the following functional areas can be identified: academic issues and faculty; human and financial resources and facilities; student-related issues; institutional and organizational processes of planning, policy management and governance; and methodology and technology (McCoy & Smith, 1985). The scope of these functional areas

support the view that conceptually, institutional research has evolved as a potential intermediator in the process of linking the academic, administrative, and information management functions of higher education. Peterson (1985) observes: "Our institutions as well as IR may become increasingly fragmented if we do not perform an intermediary role, but rather allow ourselves to be captured by one function" (p. 25).

Saupe (1981) also delineates the functions of institutional research. Included among these are: (1) responding to national and state surveys; (2) responding to questionnaires and requests for data or information; (3) serving as the institutional contact office for the state higher education agency on matters involving institutional data; and (4) providing advice on planning, policy development, as well as other institutional issues. The latter function is a natural consequence of institutional research activity (Saupe, 1981).

It has also been argued that the profession has spent too much time generating information and has done too little in the way of analysis and interpretation. In order to support and enhance institutional decision making, the profession needs to become engaged in

activities that involve policy analysis (Parker & Fenske, 1982).

Rises in the cost of education, increased competition for students, and changing demographics over the last decade have caused many institutions to look more closely at the internal processes of planning and self-assessment. Indeed, in some institutions and in multi-campus state systems, much of the impetus for these initial efforts has been provided by state legislatures, state budget offices, and Governors. Institutional research should recognize the assessment of institutional quality as a priority management task (Gapen & Morse, 1983). Moreover, IR should proactively initiate the development of criteria and data profiles to respond to the questions of both internal and external constituencies. Jean, Posey, and Smith (1984) view institutional assessment as one of the fundamental components of strategic planning, and maintain that constantly improving analytical and forecasting techniques can provide support for the establishment of a climate for strategic planning.

Ewell (1985) believes that institutional research offices are natural recipients of requests for studies concerning institutional outcomes. In relation to the

development of outcomes assessment programs, the independent role of the institutional researcher is crucial. Three important areas of fit for IR are: (1) serving as a clearinghouse for existing and projected work on outcomes; (2) IR personnel can serve as technical consultants in the design of instruments, assessments, and data interpretation; (3) IR can actually conduct the research; and (4) it may function as an advocate for the clarification of concepts and methods of outcomes assessment.

The introduction of data base software and other technological aids as tools of the profession have certainly served to facilitate the policy role of institutional research (Martorana & Kahns, 1983). The effect of technology, particularly microcomputers, has provided institutional research with greater data management flexibility and increased analytical power. Thus, the decentralization of data processing is inevitably causing a transformation of the traditional role of institutional research offices and the individuals that function within those offices.

In spite of the fact that institutional research practice varies among independent institutions and institutions within large state systems of higher edu-

cation, consistent practice is at the base of the development of the profession. Peterson (1985) asserts:

> For a profession to develop, its members need to have a common understanding of their field of practice. The term 'institutional research' sufficed during the 1970s, when practitioners on many campuses were identified with an Office of Institutional Research. Recently, growing numbers of members not affiliated with such offices, changes in name or location of offices, and the addition of new functions have led to renewed debates about the term...let me suggest it appropriate to conceive of the field as encompassing an institutional process involving information collection or development (including technology), analysis or research, and utilization activities designed to improve some aspect of, an institution of higher education (p. 25).

The apparent fragmentation of the field of institutional research and its subsequent affect on practice is evidenced by the fact that its current of influence has tended to some extent to be impacted by changes in the president's or chancellor's office (Fincher, 1985). In addition, institutional needs, the types of studies and methods employed, and the backgrounds, needs, and interests of professionals in the field have exerted strong forces that have fragmented the practice of institutional research and the profession (Peterson, 1985). Moreover, diversity in the outcomes of institutional research reflect the tailoring of the institu-

tional research function to meet the specific institutional agenda.

Hossler (1984) suggests further that relative to improving the effectiveness of institutional research, the issue of the centralization or decentralization of the function needs to be taken into account. In centralized structures difficulties tend to stem from the failure of senior level administrators to set the operational framework and agenda for institutional research practitioners. In many instances, the practice of institutional research, from the vantage point of many senior administrators, is largely circumscribed by the apparent view that the reporting of data and information to state, federal and other agencies is the most productive use of the resources invested in the operation. Unfortunately, this factor has negatively impacted the development of the profession, and has contributed, in part, to fragmentation of the field.

In summary, the practice of institutional research has traditionally been broad-based within the college or university. Its range of activity has tended to cut across institutional boundaries, and its investigations have left few stones unturned. The field is evolving from a focus primarily on data reporting, analysis, and

dissemination to one that has immense possibilities in the current climate of fiscal restraint and increased competition resulting in part from rapidly changing demographic circumstances. Indeed, the historic nature of the practice of the field suggests significant roles for IR in such areas as institutional outcomes assessment, strategic planning, and enrollment management.

In multi-campus statewide systems of higher education, the problem of a narrow focus on data and information maintenance is particularly acute and further compounds the efforts of practitioners to effectively assume emerging roles and functions. Although the importance of the data reporting and data maintenance functions should not be taken lightly by institutional research, it is clear that a certain equilibrium must be achieved relative to the operation's relationship to the institution within which it exists, and the fulfillment of essential tasks and functions mandated by the state system's central coordinating office.

If such a balance is not achieved, the natural evolution of function and practice in the field vis-a-vis circumstances both internal and external to the institution are necessarily diminished in the short-run. However, over the long-run the implications are

even wider: what may ultimately be affected is the influence, strength, and cohesiveness of the state system as it attempts to find ways to address current and emerging contemporary needs, requirements, and demands.

The Study

Large, multi-campus, public-supported state systems of higher education pose a special challenge for professionals in the field of institutional research. Often responsible for the coordinated reporting of institutional data and information to a central administrative state system office, the IR office is potentially in the unenviable position of being perceived by local constituents as an agent or extension of the statewide system office. As a result, many institutional research managers functioning inside this framework find themselves necessarily having to balance the application of limited resources to meet the needs, requirements and demands of local constituents.

The situation confronting senior administrators (individuals to whom IR managers report) is no less complicated. Constantly faced with problems associated with the allocation of shrinking resources, many top-level administrators are reviewing the role of IR with-

in the framework of administrative operations to address concerns related to the maintenance and enhancement of resources and the effective allocation of these resources.

Despite many ground-breaking efforts, what may be more fundamental to the success of such initiatives is the degree of congruence between the beliefs of institutional research managers and senior administrators regarding appropriate functions for the IR office. Suffice it to say, the efforts of institutional research managers and practitioners to serve as change agents in the field may well be in vain if in the absence of sufficient resources and top-level administrative support.

The purpose of this pilot study is essentially three-fold: (1) to examine the beliefs of IR managers and senior administrators concerning the function, purpose, and priorities of institutional research; (2) to determine if beliefs have been translated into practice; and (3) to ascertain the extent of congruence between perceptions and beliefs held at each level of management. More fundamentally, this study examines whether the beliefs of IR managers and current office practices are consistent with what senior administra-

tors believe should be the role of institutional research.

Methodology

This research focuses on institutional research managers and administrators in a large, multi-campus, state-supported system of higher education. Although this system supports institutions with diverse missions, only personnel at university centers and arts and sciences institutions are included in this analysis.

On the basis of these criteria 33 surveys were administered--17 to institutional research managers and 16 to senior administrators. The survey instruments were designed specifically for each group by the Office of Institutional Research and Data Base Management at SUNY College at Oswego. Their primary thrust was: (1) to obtain information to help define how the office of institutional research is configured within administrative operations; and (2) to ascertain the perceptions of both IR managers and senior administrators regarding the function and priorities of the institutional research office. The specific characteristics of institutional research managers and the operational

characteristics of their offices are also examined.

Among the managers of institutional research offices the rate of response to the survey administration was 100%. This can probably be attributed to the existence of a strong state-wide organization of institutional research and planning officers. Almost sixty-five percent (64.7%) of the senior administrators responded to the survey. It is significant to note that at two institutions senior administrative posts were either vacant or recently filled; therefore, they opted not to participate.

Data Analysis and Results

Characteristics of IR Managers and Offices

As a group, institutional researchers at the institutions under study possess impressive academic and experiential credentials. Almost 38% or 6 of 16 respondents indicate that they hold degrees at the doctoral level. Among these, 66.6% are in the field of higher education administration and 16.7% indicate that their doctoral study is in the area of program evaluation. Also, 16.7% report holding a Ph.D. in the field of sociology.

Seven institutional research managers (43.8%) report that the last degree earned is the masters.

Within this group two respondents or 12.5% indicate that they hold two degrees at the masters level. A wide diversity of academic backgrounds exist among holders of the masters degree, and includes such disciplines as business administration, education, public administration, operations research, history and geography. Among holders of the masters, 28.6% hold masters degrees in public administration, and 14.3% hold the masters in each of the remaining disciplines.

Only 12.5% or two respondents reveal that the last degree earned was the bachelors in the fields of education and mathematics. One respondent or 6.3% report not holding any college degree.

The number of years of experience in the field of institutional research among respondents ranges from less than one year to 19 years. Nine respondents or 56.3% indicate having worked in the field for more than nine years. Two IR managers or 12.5% have nineteen years of experience, and 6.3% have 16 years of experience. Also, 12.5% report having twelve years of experience and only 12.5% report less than one year of experience.

Although a variety of office and title/position names are reported by institutional research managers

there is a marked degree of consistency in terms of the imagery projected by the name. The terms "institutional research," "institutional studies," or "analytic studies," appears in 87.5% of the responses of institutional research managers. Other terms employed in office titles include "research and evaluation," "records," and "policy analysis."

A variety of position titles are also associated with institutional research officers. Among these titles are coordinator, director, assistant to the vice president (for IR), and director of IR and records/ assistant vice president for academic affairs.

In terms of accountability, 50% report directly to academic vice presidents or provosts. Only 12.5% report to the president. Also, 12.5% have direct accountability to the vice president for administration. The following positions are also reported by the remaining 25% as supervisory to institutional research offices: (1) associate vice president for faculty and staff relations; (2) assistant vice president for academic research; (3) assistant to the president for planning; and (4) vice president for university services.

Although 81.3% of the I.R. officers indicate that

they do not have administrative authority over other units, it is significant to note that 18.8% have one of the following units under their direction: academic records, administrative computing, or academic evaluation.

Relative to staffing, 37.5% of the IR managers have only one full-time professional employee (not including themselves). Also, 12.5% indicate the presence of two professionals on their staff, and 12.5% report three professional staff members. Four or five professional staff is reported by 12.5%. The remaining 25% indicate that their staff consists of one part-time professional. Few technical positions are found among IR offices, however, 6.3% have three full-time technical staff persons and 6.3% report the presence of a single part-time staff member in this category.

In the secretarial/clerical occupational category, 43.8% of the respondents have one full-time staff member. However, 6.2% reveal having a staff that includes two or three secretarial/clerical positions. Only one manager (6.3%) has a part-time secretarial/clerical position in their office. Note that 56.3% of the institutional research managers report that their offices are staffed with part-time (6.3%) and full-time

(50%) secretarial/clerical support respectively. These data suggest that the remaining offices either have no secretarial/ clerical staff, rely upon other offices for support, or depend upon themselves, workstudy students, interns or other temporary employees to meet secretarial/clerical needs. Overall, IR managers tend minimally to utilize workers in the latter three categories.

Characteristics of Senior Administrators

Respondents to the survey of senior administrators were asked to indicate: (1) name/title of office/ division; (2) title of occupied position; (3) official administrative reporting line; (4) membership in the President's "cabinet"; and (5) if their position is classified as one of the "officers of the college." For purposes of this study, senior administrators are the college/university managers to whom institutional research managers report.

Among a total of eleven respondents, 45.4% report that they are academic vice presidents, and 9.1% report holding the position of assistant vice president for research and evaluation. One response suggests a more centralized administrative approach, with institutional

research reporting to the assistant to the president for planning (9.1%) within the president's office. In this case, both operationally and functionally IR is a part of the president's office. In addition, 18.2% indicate that institutional research reports directly to the president. The remaining 18.2% identified themselves as administrative vice presidents. With the exception of the presidents (who report to the state system chancellor) all senior administrators indicate that they report directly to the president of the institution, and that officially, they are members of the president's cabinet or advisory/management team. Moreover, 100% of the senior administrators indicate that their position is officially classified as one of the "officers of the college."

Issues Concerning IR

Table 1 summarizes the responses of IR managers and senior administrators regarding the extent of agreement on a number of Likert-scaled items pertaining to the general concerns, interests and issues of institutional research. The percentages reported are based on the total number of responses to each item.

Institutional research managers and senior administrators unanimously agree or strongly agree that:

(1) good working relations with administrative computing improves the effectiveness of IR; (2) that local constituencies need IR to provide data and information in useful formats; and (3) that the work of IR should be based on sound methods and techniques. The majority of IR managers (73.3%) and senior administrators (81.8%) also agree or strongly agree that institutional research is a profession.

Concerning the need for increased personnel resources, 75% of the IR managers and 63.6% of the senior administrators either agree or strongly agree that improved personnel resources could serve to enhance the effectiveness of the office.

The position of IR within the framework of institutional administrative operations, and the perception and utilization of the office by local administrators and constituencies were also investigated. Just over 81% of the IR managers agree or strongly agree that the position of institutional research provides an exceptionally unique and useful vantage point as compared to 90.9% of the senior administrators. Also, the majority of the IR managers (62.5%) and senior administrators (80.0%) concur that the college president regularly requests that special projects be carried out by the

office. Thirty percent (30%) of the senior administrators and 33.8% of the IR managers agree or strongly agree that most constituencies have little knowledge about the work of institutional research.

Finally, two of the most disconcerting, yet perhaps most enlightening response summaries involve the clarity and realism of institutional expectations and faculty members perceptions of institutional research. Only 26.7% of the IR managers and 54.5% of the senior administrators report that they agree or strongly agree that general institutional expectations are realistic and clear. Concerning whether faculty members possess a positive perception of IR, only 37.6% of the IR managers and 72.7% of the senior administrators agree or strongly agree that this is the case.

The relatively low percentage of IR managers reporting that institutional expectations of the IR office are clear and realistic may signal a certain degree of evolution in the practice of institutional research as it relates to local campus needs and requirements. Also, the relatively small percentage (26.7%) of IR managers that believe institutional expectations are clear and realistic may suggest the prevalence of a lack of understanding on the part of

top level administrators as to how institutional research offices can best serve local campus needs. As pressures mount to revise or completely change the local role of institutional research, IR managers may sense that institutional expectations are imprecise and nebulous. These findings support the contention that institutional researchers are experiencing a role or identity crisis in higher education administration.

Institutional Research Functions

Table 2 presents a summary of the responses of IR managers and senior administrators to a number of items concerning the function of institutional research. The results are discussed below.

Overall, the pattern of responses to items focused on some of the prominent functions of institutional research reflect a high level of consensus between IR managers and senior administrators. There are, however, some differences of opinion. For example, while 60% of the IR managers agree or strongly agree that information management is the single most important function of their office, only 30% of the senior administrators concur. Moreover, 31.3% of the IR managers and 9.1% of the senior administrators either disa-

gree or strongly disagree that addressing the data and information needs of academic departments ranks high in the list of IR priorities.

Concerning whether planning is the most important function of IR offices, 43.8% of the managers as opposed to 20% of the administrators, either disagree or strongly disagree. Moreover, the issue of evaluation and assessment activities as the primary focus of institutional research received little approval from IR managers (12.5%) and senior administrators (20%). This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that 43.8% of the I.R. managers and 90% of the senior administrators either agree or strongly agree that approaches to outcomes measurement can effectively be developed in most IR offices. Hence, although outcomes measurement may not be seen as a primary focus for IR, it is evident that among senior administrators the institutional research office is viewed as perhaps the most fruitful ground for the development of institutional approaches to outcomes measurement.

Perception vs. Reality of IR Practice

Table 3 lists twelve (12) items that are frequently indicated in the literature as either emerging functions or functions traditionally performed by in-

stitutional research. Institutional research managers were asked to respond "yes" if they believed the role or function should be performed by their office. Similarly, respondents indicated "yes" if, in practice, the role or function is in fact performed by IR.

Although affirmative responses for IR managers and senior administrators overall reflect a marked degree of similarity, there are some patterns that emerged. Both groups almost unanimously concur in the belief that the following functions should be performed by the institutional research office: (1) data collection/analysis/dissemination; (2) state and federal reporting; (3) handling ad hoc data requests; (4) policy-oriented research; (5) clearinghouse for data; (6) defining the institutional data base; and (7) enrollment projections.

Sharper differences in the beliefs of institutional research managers and senior administrators, however, can be observed relative to a number of other functions. For example, while 100% of the senior administrators believe outcomes measurement should be performed by the institutional research office, 73.3% of the IR managers agree. Only 31.3% of the IR managers report that their office in fact carries out this

function.

Markedly fewer respondents in both groups express the belief that testing and evaluation and finance/budget analysis should be performed by IR. It is interesting that although only 26.7% of the IR managers believe testing and evaluation should be performed by their offices, 31.3% are in fact engaged in it. Perhaps the fact that 50% of the senior administrators responding believe that testing and evaluation should be performed by IR, in part, explains why the function is performed in instances where the IR manager believes it to be inappropriately placed. For IR managers, testing and evaluation is the function least believed should be performed by institutional research.

On the other hand, among senior administrators the belief that finance/budget analysis should be conducted by IR received the smallest percentage of affirmative responses (30%). Over half (53.3%) of the IR managers responded affirmatively. Note that 40% of the IR managers report that their office is involved in finance/budget analysis while none of the senior administrators indicate that the function is performed.

Finally, 71.4% of the IR managers and 90% of the senior administrators indicate that strategic planning

should be performed by institutional research. However, only 21.4% of the IR managers and 60% of the senior administrators report that the role is actually fulfilled.

Priority of IR Functions

In order to ascertain further divergences between the attitudes of IR managers and senior administrators about the function and role of institutional research, each group was asked to select the five functions that they believe to be priorities, and to rank order them from 1, the lowest priority, to 5, the highest priority. Table 4 shows the calculated Index for IR managers and senior administrators. This index is derived by multiplying the percentage of respondents in each rank category by the numerical rank assigned to that category. The result of each category is then summed to arrive at the Index.

In order of priority, the top five functions for IR managers are as follows: (1) data collection/ analysis/ dissemination; (2) policy-oriented research; (3) state and federal data reporting; and (4) enrollment projections. Tied as a fifth priority are handling ad hoc data requests and defining the institutional data

base.

A similar pattern of functional priorities is revealed for senior administrators: (1) data collection/analysis/ dissemination; (2) state and federal data reporting; (3) enrollment projections; tied are (4) policy-oriented research; and (5) outcomes measurement. Although not included in Table 4, strategic planning appears as the sixth rank priority function for this group.

It is noteworthy that although outcomes measurement did not emerge among the top five priorities of institutional researchers, this function emerged in the fifth rank for senior administrators. While strategic planning and outcomes measurement received significantly lower priority ratings from IR managers, handling ad hoc requests and defining the institutional data base rank fifth among the top five priorities. However, these functions do not emerge among the top five priorities of senior administrators. Handling ad hoc data requests, and defining the institutional data base emerged as significantly lower priority functions among senior administrators.

In summary IR managers and senior administrators agree on the top four priority functions of the insti-

tutional research office: (1) conducting policy-oriented research; (2) data collection, analysis and dissemination; (3) state and federal data reporting; and (4) enrollment projections. It should be observed that two of these functions, state and federal data reporting and enrollment projections are geared specifically towards meeting the data and information requirements of the state central administrative office. At the same time, central administrative institutional research personnel and campus level IR personnel would probably acknowledge that there are important the benefits to be accrued on both sides as a result of efforts to effectively maintain and report data and information via centralized data collection systems. An important underlying premise of these systems is that they facilitate comparisons among state-supported institutions.

Summary and Discussion

The background and characteristics of IR managers responding to our survey are generally consistent with the literature of the field which suggests the prevalence of a wide variety of backgrounds among practitioners. Although the vast majority of the respondents hold degrees in education and the social sciences, a wide variety of discipline specialties are

prevalent among IR managers. Moreover, differences in the level of education achieved range from no college degree (one case) to degrees at the doctoral level. While education through the bachelors and masters levels clearly indicate a diversity of academic backgrounds among respondents, at the doctoral level most degrees were in the field of education.

The titles of offices also tend to reflect a focus on institutional research, planning, analysis, exist and analytic studies. Only two instances exist outside of this generalization, with one office title suggesting a focus on evaluation and another on records. Traditionally, however, the work of institutional research has tended to have some relationship, relevance and implications for administrative units that are discretely focused on these areas of responsibility.

Also, while half of the IR managers report directly to academic vice presidents, others report directly to administrative vice presidents, associate and assistant vice presidents, and assistants to the president. Only 12.5% of the IR managers report directly to the college president. At the same time, however, all senior administrators are members of the president's

cabinet or advisory/management team, and their position is officially classified as one of the "officers of the college." These findings suggest that IR managers typically report to potentially influential positions, and perhaps individuals, within the administration of their respective institutions. However, the nature of higher education administrative operations might suggest the existence of clearly defined "spheres of influence" within the institution.

The results of our survey also reveal that there is little difference between perceptions of institutional research held by senior administrators and IR managers. It is significant, however, that both groups by and large believe that general institutional expectations for IR lack clarity and solid definition within the framework of administrative operations. Clearly, these results suggest that much more needs to be done in the way of identifying a proper fit for IR at the institutional level. In the final analysis, external factors as opposed to internal initiatives may prove to be more instrumental in causing the crystalization and clarification of the role of institutional research in colleges and universities. Also, senior administrators need to provide greater support to such operations and

take a much more aggressive posture in promoting the potential and capabilities of IR operations vis-a-vis the changing conditions of higher education.

Finally, our analysis of the priorities of institutional research demonstrates that the priorities of IR managers tend generally to be consistent with those of senior administrators. Examination of the priorities of each group reflect a focus on tasks and responsibilities that are largely geared toward responding to the data needs and requests of the central office of the state-wide system. To be sure, individual campuses benefit tremendously from such a centralized arrangement; however, this situation nonetheless poses significant difficulties for the local institutional research operation. For example, the maintenance of various information/data collection systems by institutional research staff are not only time consuming, but may tend to cause local constituencies to view IR as an extension of the central office. Given this, it is not difficult to understand why IR managers and senior administrators believe that institutional research lacks clear definition within campus administration. Perhaps this is because even they tend to regard the local function of IR as inextricably

linked to and driven by the needs of the state system central administration. Moreover, in the case of IR managers such beliefs may also be a function of the length of time they have worked within state-supported system of higher education. Although massive data and reporting requirements via systems coordinated by central IR help to relieve many of the pressures of state and federal reporting, at the same time, they can forestall the natural evolution of IR at the campus level, and thus negatively impact the extent to which IR can effectively help to address local needs.

Institutional research operations, especially those at institutions in large state-wide systems, need to implement appropriate strategies to help ensure that local constituencies understand that their primary objective is to provide service at the campus level as opposed to the state central office level. Such strategies might include the establishment of a broad-based IR advisory committee to facilitate the identification of local issues that the office can help to address.

As many institutions begin to identify prominent roles for institutional research in areas like strategic planning, outcomes measurement, and data base

development and management, those institutions caught in the routine web of data reporting and data maintenance will fail to keep in step with emerging trends and evolving initiatives in higher education that are being taken as a matter of course for survival.

Implications

The results of this study have important implications for institutional research and its practitioners, higher education in general, and the need for more comparative study in terms of the role, function and purpose of institutional research in large, state-supported systems. For example, studies of similar state-wide systems might reveal that the difficulties identified by this research also exist in other instances. Such comparative research might help to resolve some of the issues concerning problems of service delivery and the professionalization of the field. Although professionalization is dependent to a large extent on the application of common techniques, theories, and methodologies, and the organization of the fields' practioners, the difficulties that may prevent the effective occurrence of these criteria need first to be identified. As external pressures become

more intense, and as federal and state governments and officials become more concerned with the quality and consistency of the delivery and outcome of the educational process, greater uniformity will necessarily emerge relative to institutional strategic planning, outcomes assessment and measurement, and performance evaluation. In the final analysis, the impetus for professionalization may be imposed by external pressures as opposed to the internal generation of such initiatives. Indeed, the latter approach will prove to be less painful and more meaningful, and even effective, from the vantage point of individual colleges and universities.

Finally more attention needs to be given to the evolution of institutional research within the context of large state-wide systems of higher education. Although it may be desirable and appropriate for central administrations to mandate the establishment of an IR office at individual institutions, this should be accomplished in such a way as to facilitate the natural evolution of the operation's campus role and function. In the end, it may be detrimental to the institutions as well as to the state-wide system if this issue is not taken into account.

Recommendations

If institutional research intends to provide a greater contribution at the local campus level, IR managers and their supervisors need to take the initiative in terms of paving the way for a refocusing of the office's activities. Although individual campuses benefit tremendously from centralized data collection systems, appropriate measures need to be taken to help ensure that these activities become a matter of routine as opposed to the sole function of the office. Senior administrators need to recognize that the task of data maintenance and reporting can be accomplished in a more cost effective manner by permitting the designation of such responsibilities to technical rather than professional personnel. Our analysis of the backgrounds of IR managers clearly indicate that they are exceptionally well-prepared, and thus should not necessarily have to be directly engaged in the business of data maintenance for either local or central office purposes. It is clear, however, that the responsibility of ensuring the accurate and timely reporting of institutional data should rest within the office responsible for institutional research.

Senior administrators should also assume a more

aggressive role in promoting the capabilities and possibilities of IR. Given their often influential role in administration, and membership within the governance structure and other bodies, they are in perhaps the position that can best serve this purpose.

Last, state-wide higher education central administrative offices should recognize that their own effectiveness is impacted to a great extent by the effectiveness of individual campus units. Obviously, the viability of these systems is affected by the ability of individual institutions to readily adapt to changing demographic and fiscal circumstances. Moreover, they need to be more cognizant of the impact of their demands on the local situation and attempt to coordinate their efforts more closely with the campuses in order to enhance the survivability and effectiveness of not only the institutions, but the state-wide higher education system as a whole.

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TABLE 1
Summary of IR Managers and Senior Administrators
Responses: General Items

Item	Percentage of Responses			
	IR Managers		Senior Administrators	
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Institutional research (IR) is a profession.	73.3	20.0	81.8	9.1
Increased personnel resources are needed to improve the effectiveness of IR.	75.0	18.8	63.6	9.1
Good working relations with administrative computing personnel improve the effectiveness of IR.	100.0	--	100.0	--
Local constituencies need IR to provide data/information in a useful form to facilitate local planning and decision making.	100.0	--	100.0	--
The work of IR should be objective and based on sound methods and techniques.	100.0	--	100.0	--
The role of IR is clearly defined within the framework of administrative operations.	37.6	56.3	90.0	0.0

TABLE 1 (continued)

Item	Percentage of Responses			
	IR Managers		Senior Administrators	
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
The position of IR in the institution provides an exceptionally unique and useful vantage point.	81.3	--	90.9	0.0
General institutional expectations of IR are realistic and quite clear.	26.7	53.3	54.5	0.0
The college president regularly requests that IR conduct special projects.	62.5	37.5	80.0	20.0
Faculty members have a positive perception of IR.	37.6	12.5	72.7	9.1
Most institutional constituencies have little knowledge about the work of IR.	33.8	18.8	30.0	40.0
Studies and reports prepared by the IR office are generally considered in the process of institutional planning and decision making.	--	--	90.9	9.1

NOTE: Percentages are based on the total number of responses to each item. Percentages may not total 100.0 due to exclusion of "neutral" responses.

TABLE 2
Summary of IR Managers and Senior Administrators
Responses: Institutional Research Functions

Item	Percentage of Responses			
	IR Managers		Senior Administrators	
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
IR is the clearinghouse for all institutional data.	62.5	31.3	72.7	27.3
Planning is the most important function of IR offices.	31.3	43.8	50.0	20.0
Responding to external surveys and external ad hoc data/information requests represent the sole function of IR.	12.5	87.5	20.0	60.0
The IR office works closely with finance and budget personnel.	68.8	12.5	63.6	9.1
IR offices need to be involved in defining institutional planning data bases.	93.8	0.0	90.0	10.0
Evaluation and assessment activities should be the primary focus of IR offices.	12.5	56.3	20.0	50.0

TABLE 2 (continued)

Item	Percentage of Responses			
	IR Managers		Senior Administrators	
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Information management is the single most important function of IR.	60.0	20.0	30.0	30.0
Conducting policy-oriented research is a high priority for the IR office.	62.5	0.0	90.0	10.0
Data collection, analysis and dissemination is the most important role of IR.	60.0	20.0	60.0	20.0
Responding to central administrative office requests for data and information is given high priority.	87.5	6.3	90.0	0.0
Enrollment planning and management is an important function of IR.	75.0	12.5	90.9	9.1
Addressing the data and information needs of academic departments ranks high in the list of IR priorities.	50.0	31.3	72.7	9.1

TABLE 2 (continued)

Item	Percentage of Responses			
	IR Managers		Senior Administrators	
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Approaches to outcomes measurement can effectively be developed in most IR offices.	43.8	25.0	90.0	0.0
The maintenance of central administrative student, course, and other information systems is a top priority.	62.5	25.0	50.0	30.0

NOTE: Percentages are based on the total number of responses to each item. Percentages may not total 100.0 due to exclusion of "neutral" responses.

TABLE 3
Perceptions and Realities of
Institutional Research

Function	IR Managers Percentage YES Responses		Senior Administrators Percentage YES Responses	
	Belief	Practice	Belief	Practice
Data collection/ analysis/ dissemination	100.0	100.0	100.0	90.9
State and federal reporting	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Outcomes measurement	73.3	31.3	100.0	70.0
Policy-oriented research	93.3	62.5	100.0	72.7
Strategic planning	71.4	21.4	90.0	60.0
Handling ad hoc data requests	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Clearinghouse for data	93.3	93.3	100.0	90.1
Testing and evaluation	26.7	31.3	50.0	20.0
Defining institutional data base	93.3	86.7	100.0	90.0
Finance/budget analysis	53.3	40.0	30.0	0.0
Enrollment projections	93.3	100.0	100.0	100.0
Fact book development	85.7	53.3	90.1	70.0

NOTE: Percentages are based on the total number of respondents to each item.

TABLE 4
Priority of Institutional Research Functions
IR Managers vs. Senior Administrators

Function	IR Managers		Senior Administrators	
	Index	Rank	Index	Rank
Data collection/ analysis/dissemination	238	1	322	1
Policy-oriented research	206	2	156	4
State and federal data reporting	200	3	178	2
Enrollment projections	175	4	167	3
Handling ad hoc data requests	131	5	*	-
Defining institutional data base	131	5	*	-
Outcomes measurement	*	-	144	5

NOTE: Respondents were requested to rank the top five institutional research functions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest priority and 1 the lowest priority. The Weighted Priority Index is derived by multiplying the percentage of respondents in each rank category by the numerical rank assigned to that category. The result of each category is then summed to arrive at the index.

*Not indicated among top five priorities of I.R. managers or senior administrators.